

THE CHALLENGE TO SOVIET INTERESTS IN EASTERN  
EUROPE: BULGARIA AND CZECHOSLOVAKIA

J. F. Brown

December 1986

**RAND**

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## A RAND NOTE

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## PREFACE

This Note was prepared as a complement to the publications of a recently completed Project AIR FORCE study, "Soviet Vulnerabilities in Eastern Europe," directed by A. Ross Johnson. Under that project, RAND conducted country studies of four East European countries. The results were published in RAND Note N-1891-AF, *Poland in Crisis*, A. Ross Johnson, July 1982; RAND Report R-3190-AF, *The Challenge to Soviet Interests in Eastern Europe: Romania, Hungary, East Germany*, F. Stephen Larrabee, December 1984. A project overview was published in RAND Report R-3189-AF, *Challenges to Soviet Control in Eastern Europe: An Overview*, J. F. Brown and A. Ross Johnson, December 1984.

The present Note examines socioeconomic and political developments in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia. It considers the prospects of new instabilities in these two countries, long considered the most stable members of the Soviet bloc. As in the earlier companion studies, the emphasis is on examining domestic factors that could lead to new challenges to Soviet interests in Eastern Europe in the next decade.

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## SUMMARY

Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia have long been considered the Soviet Union's most stable allies in Eastern Europe, and neither appears likely to present challenges to Soviet interests in the near future. Nonetheless, both countries have been victims of the general economic downturn in the Eastern bloc, and each is characterized by political trends that, combined with economic sluggishness, could indirectly threaten Soviet hegemony.

### BULGARIA

Bulgaria has been a loyal Soviet ally throughout Todor Zhivkov's party leadership, dating back to 1954. This loyalty reflects both cultural affinities between Bulgaria and the Soviet Union and Zhivkov's desire to ensure his own tenure. However, Bulgaria's primary reason for hewing so closely to the Soviet line has probably been the economic favors such adherence has brought--as well as the Soviet determination that it should do so.

Soviet aid has been largely responsible for Bulgaria's economic progress since World War II. Once one of the least industrialized countries in Europe, Bulgaria had by 1983 progressed to the point where industry accounted for three-quarters of its exports. This progress was assisted by generous supplies of Soviet oil, some of which Bulgaria exported for hard currency to finance its industrial investments.

Bulgaria's economic progress has been limited by its system of rigid central planning, although some cautious steps have been taken toward increasing the efficiency of the system. During the 1970s, bonus and incentive schemes were introduced, mainly in agriculture. These were followed by the New Economic Mechanism (NEM), which contains elements of decentralization, scope for profit, and free pricing. However, these modifications have apparently not removed the deficiencies in the economy. In 1985, Bulgaria was hit by a severe winter, followed by a dry summer, leading to electric power shortages that plunged streets and homes into darkness and causing a decline in agricultural output of 9 percent from the previous year.

Bulgaria's solidarity with Moscow has not, however, been without some deviations. In the late 1950s, Bulgaria showed an interest in China's experiments in implementing Communism. This interest was probably furthered by Khrushchev's attempts to court Yugoslavia, whose incorporation of Macedonia is still disputed by Bulgaria. During the 1970s, Zhivkov's daughter Lyudmila became Minister of Culture and attempted to revive Bulgarian pride in the nation's cultural achievements. Her efforts to encourage cultural ties to the rest of Europe irritated Moscow, but that irritation abated with Lyudmila's death in 1981. In 1984, Bulgaria again showed a glimmer of independence in refusing to join the Soviet-Polish-Czechoslovak propaganda campaign against West Germany.

However, Bulgaria's attempts to improve relations with the West have been jeopardized by the publicity surrounding alleged Bulgarian complicity in the attempt to assassinate Pope John Paul II. Although the Bulgarian agent was legally exonerated, the country is still widely assumed to have been involved. Bulgaria's reputation has also been tarnished by the forced Bulgarization of its Turkish minority.

Despite its occasional gestures of independence, Bulgaria is most concerned about its ties with the Soviet Union. Yet there has recently been some evidence that Moscow is not completely happy with its loyal Balkan satellite. In 1985, the Soviet ambassador complained publicly about the quality of Bulgarian goods exported to the Soviet Union, and there has been speculation that Gorbachev believes it is time to turn Zhivkov out to ceremonial pasture.

The present situation in Bulgaria is thus considerably different from that of 1980, when Bulgarians were prosperous and were anticipating continuation and consolidation of their progress. Economic progress has now halted and in many areas has been reversed; Bulgaria's international reputation has been damaged; and it is losing its most-favored-nation status with Moscow. Taken together, these factors suggest more fluidity in Bulgaria's political future.



## CZECHOSLOVAKIA

The Czechoslovak economy grew rapidly during the first half of the 1970s, with consumption increasing by 27 percent between 1971 and 1975. There were several reasons for this:

- Purges neutralized whatever dissent remained after the 1968 Soviet invasion, eliminating political turmoil.
- The Czechoslovak people withdrew from politics and turned to material aggrandizement and consumerism, fueled by Soviet economic aid.
- The regime has tolerated Western-style music and encouraged the building of weekend homes in the country, thereby keeping the people's minds off politics.
- Gustav Husak, who became party leader in 1969, has been relatively moderate in his treatment of those who participated in the 1968 uprising.
- The Slovaks gained some permanent autonomy in 1968, which ensured peace and quiet in their part of the country for at least the immediate future.

But Czechoslovak prosperity did not last long. The worldwide recession caused by the OPEC oil price increases of the 1970s eventually made its way to the Eastern bloc. In 1981 and 1982, Czechoslovakia experienced negative industrial growth, and a great many unfinished investment projects could not be paid for by output and export. Czechoslovakia's industrial infrastructure needs to be modernized, but the regime, traumatized by the events of 1968, fears reform.

Sooner or later, the present leaders will die, and they may be replaced by more imaginative successors who are not so burdened by the trauma of the Prague Spring. This could ease the economic crisis, but it could also exacerbate Czech/Slovak tensions unless very careful choices are made in the allocation of top government posts between the two nationalities. The ethnic Hungarians within Slovakia are already disaffected.

While few Czechs are overtly hostile to the regime, some groups, including Charter 77 and the Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Persecuted, are trying to offer alternative approaches. There is also an active underground press, and interest in religion has increased, although not necessarily in the organized Roman Catholic Church.

The Church is much stronger in Slovakia, where the population is generally somewhat suspicious of Czech political "alternatives." Those alternatives, however, may have some appeal for an emerging group of younger Slovaks who do not have much use for either the Church or the regime.

If Czechoslovak society moves toward grudging tolerance of the state, an uneasy stalemate of calm could develop. Under those conditions, the Soviets are not likely to perceive a threat to their interests. But if a new generation of leaders attempts to implement economic reforms and political relaxation, a greater societal involvement in matters of state could result. Moreover, if the Church holds its ground in Slovakia, and the Czech Church revives with Vatican support, some real institutional independence could result. Under these conditions, more overt challenges to Soviet interests are more likely.

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## I. BULGARIA

Political leadership in the four Communist Balkan states has been remarkable for its longevity. Tito, who became head of the Yugoslav party in 1938 and head of state after the Partisan victory, remained in both capacities until his death in 1980. Enver Hoxha became the first head of the Albanian party in 1941 and held the post until he died in April 1985 at the age of 76. The longevity of Tito and Hoxha is unequaled, but that of the Romanian and Bulgarian leaders has also been noteworthy. In Romania, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej was party leader from 1945 till his death in 1965. His successor, Nicolae Ceausescu, is still in power. In Bulgaria, Todor Zhivkov has been party leader since 1954 and is the dean of Warsaw Pact party leaders. Between 1962 and 1971, he was also prime minister, and in 1971, he became head of state--all the time, of course, holding onto his party position. And while the continuity in the Bulgarian leadership is impressive, it has not been without disturbance and even danger, especially in the earlier years.

### ZHIVKOV'S RULE

At the time of his appointment as party leader in 1954, Zhivkov was very much a compromise candidate. The vacancy at the top of the party occurred only because Vulko Chervenkov, Bulgaria's "little Stalin," had to give up either the party leadership or the premiership to conform with the separation of state and party functions ordained by Stalin's successors in Moscow. Chervenkov, rather surprisingly, chose to keep the premiership, presumably because Georgi Malenkov, who appeared to be the strongest of Stalin's potential successors, had become the Soviet premier. It turned out to be a serious mistake, cutting Chervenkov off from his real power base and increasing his vulnerability when his enemies in Bulgaria itself, in Moscow, and in Belgrade began their campaign against him.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See J. F. Brown, *Bulgaria Under Communist Rule*, Praeger Publishers, New York, 1970, pp. 23-28.

Zhivkov was a "safe" compromise candidate and was overshadowed by more brilliant rivals, but he was not without experience. Although he was only 43, he had fought with the Bulgarian partisan movement in World War II, had been a Central Committee member since 1948, and had for a time held the posts of head of the Sofia party central committee, head of the Sofia branch of the Fatherland Front organization, and head of the Sofia city people's council. In 1950, he had become a candidate-member of the Politburo and a secretary of the party Central Committee. And what he may have lacked in intellectual ability he made up for in political instinct, patience, and a Balkan peasant shrewdness. Not the least of his political gifts was an ability to perceive, anticipate, and adapt to the changing moods in Moscow.<sup>2</sup>

In 1954, in addition to his personal experience and abilities and his attributes as a compromise choice, Zhivkov had three unquestionable assets:

1. He was already building up a party following based in the capital, Sofia. (There is a close parallel here with the career of Antonin Novotny, who became head of the Prague party organization after 1945.)
2. He was a "home" Communist immediately after the death of Stalin, when "Muscovites" were falling out of political favor throughout Eastern Europe. Zhivkov's partisan record was an asset in this regard.
3. He was not directly connected with the brutal crimes perpetrated by the party during its ascent to power after 1945. His main rival in 1954, Anton Yugov, had, as interior minister, been directly involved in these crimes and, though he was to become prime minister in 1956 when Chervenkov was forced to give up this position, his earlier crimes were part of the bill of indictment when he was finally disgraced in 1962.

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<sup>2</sup> For a brief biographical sketch of Zhivkov, see J. F. Brown, *The New Eastern Europe: The Khrushchev Era and After*, Frederick A. Praeger, New York, 1966, pp. 257-258.

Zhivkov, therefore, was acceptable to practically everyone who counted in 1954. It was now a question of consolidating and extending his power. To do this, he needed to (1) defeat his domestic rivals and master those institutions of state, especially the police and the armed forces, on which stable leadership depended; and (2) win--and keep--Moscow's confidence. Zhivkov conducted this double strategy brilliantly.<sup>3</sup>

After 1954, Khrushchev's open de-Stalinization campaign gave Zhivkov his first political boost. Khrushchev's "secret speech" denouncing Stalin at the 20th CPSU Party Congress in 1956 led to the Bulgarian Communist Party's own de-Stalinizing April Plenum in the same year. This plenum, which is still invoked as one of the great turning points in the party's history, led to the dismissal of Chervenkov from the premiership. For several years following his dismissal, Chervenkov had considerable political and ideological influence, but it was obvious that he was highly unlikely to return to power.

After 1956, the factionalism in the party increased. Zhivkov's leading personal rival was then Anton Yugov, the main "home" Communist. Yugov had fallen under a shadow shortly before Stalin died, but de-Stalinization had catapulted him to the premiership. From the charges leveled at Yugov after his dismissal in 1962, it is clear that his years as premier were marked by constant differences with Zhivkov. But even more important than the personal rivalries animating Bulgarian politics was the need for Zhivkov to wrest control of the security apparatus--the institution that any regime leader must master to secure his power. Zhivkov accomplished this with the purge of Politburo member and long-time interior minister Georgi Tsankov, also in 1962. With the simultaneous purging of Yugov and Tsankov, following the dismissal five years earlier of Politburo member and economic planning chief Georgi Chankov, Zhivkov was on his way to undisputed power.

The seal on his supremacy was finally set after the failure of an army conspiracy against him in April 1965. Much is still not known about this bizarre episode, which appears to be unique in East European

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<sup>3</sup> See Brown, *Bulgaria Under Communist Rule*, pp. 53-82 and 96-142.

Communist history. We do not know the extent of the conspiracy, for example, or the real motives of the conspirators. But there appears to have been some interaction between the officers involved--some of them of field rank--and various local party branches, especially the branch in Vratsa, a short distance north of Sofia. Thus, while the military elements in the conspiracy were mopped up relatively quickly, it took at least two years for the "viper's nest" of Vratsa to be cleared.<sup>4</sup>

Whatever the motives and the strength of the conspiracy, its discovery and defeat enabled Zhivkov to rule without challenge. He had successfully resisted all threats, personal and institutional. Just as important, he had survived the dismissal of Khrushchev in October 1964 and his replacement by Brezhnev. This was no mean feat for a satellite leader who had deferred to Khrushchev with an alacrity and ostentation many had found excessive. But Zhivkov both read and obeyed the signals coming from the Kremlin, and, close though his relations had been with Khrushchev, the assumption of power by Brezhnev in 1964 began an equally close and apparently friendly association that lasted 18 years, one from which Bulgaria was to derive a great deal.

For Zhivkov, after his first, very difficult 10 years as party leader, this association was to guarantee the longevity of his tenure. After 1965, there was no real challenge to his authority. In fact, whatever political excitement has been generated within the Bulgarian regime since then has concerned the rise of putative heirs to Zhivkov and their subsequent fall into political oblivion: Mitko Grigorov, who led the campaign against Yugov in 1962; then Luchezar Avramov; then Ivan Abadzhiev, who routed out the conspirators in Vratsa in 1967; then Alexander Lilov, purged in 1982. And these were just the most prominent of the political casualties of the last two decades. Whether their downfalls were simply the result of their power ambitions or whether aspects of policy were also involved is not known. It is unlikely, though, that the latter played any great role. Their apparent emergence as actual or potential "crown princes" probably attracted enough followers to form the kind of power base that Zhivkov, mindful of the

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 173-189. See also Paul Lendvai, *Eagles in Cobwebs: Nationalism and Communism in the Balkans*, Doubleday, New York, 1969, pp. 235-239.



factionalism in the 1950s, could instantly have suspected. Only in the case of Lilov and the relatively relaxed cultural policy for which he apparently stood are questions of policy apt to have played an important role.

## THE SOVIET CONNECTION

The loyalty and stability with which Bulgaria, unlike some of the other Warsaw Pact members, has served the Soviet Union for the past 40 years is not likely to have been underestimated in Moscow. Bulgaria has strategic importance, because it borders on two volatile NATO allies (Greece and Turkey) in a region of crucial historical importance to the Soviet Union. Moreover, the defection of Yugoslavia in 1948 and Albania in the early 1960s, followed by the partial defection of Romania shortly afterwards, left Bulgaria as Moscow's only loyal dependency in the Balkans.

The Bulgarian relationship therefore was vital to the Soviet Union, and it was a relationship for which the Soviets were prepared to pay. Western economists differ radically in their estimates of the amount of financial aid Sofia has received from Moscow in the form of trade subsidies, low-credit and interest-free loans, concealed credits, etc., but it is safe to assume that Bulgaria has received proportionately more than its fair share of the considerable Soviet aid that has been given Eastern Europe. Of particular importance have been Soviet energy supplies, including above-contract amounts of oil not payable in hard currency, some of which Bulgaria refined and then exported to the West.<sup>5</sup>

Despite Bulgarian complaints over the past several years about the low prices their farm produce has brought on Comecon markets,<sup>6</sup> there can be no doubt about the material benefits of the Soviet connection. These benefits have led to considerable speculation about the motives for Bulgaria's apparent unflinching loyalty. Zhivkov's total dependence on Moscow's support for the establishment and maintenance of his position

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<sup>5</sup> On September 7, 1984, *Financial Times*, quoting Wharton Econometrics, stated that in 1980-1983, Bulgaria made a profit of \$2.2 billion on the reexport of refined or chemically reprocessed Soviet oil.

<sup>6</sup> *Financial Times*, October 26, 1984, commenting on the meeting of the Comecon premiers in Havana.

must obviously be considered. So must, at least to some extent, the traditional pro-Russian sentiment among many Bulgarians that results from historical, racial, and cultural affinity. Moreover, anti-Yugoslav feeling arising from the Macedonian dispute is never far below the surface of Bulgarian political life. The Tito-Stalin break, therefore, could have strengthened Bulgarian resolve to remain loyal to Moscow, since this may have seemed to offer the best hope for recovering Macedonia.

Nevertheless, the suspicion of cool calculation on the part of the Zhivkov-led regime remains, especially as Zhivkov has grown in confidence and political experience. From no other source could Bulgaria have obtained the volume and variety of material assistance it received from the Soviet Union in the 1970s. Whether the economic plans for which Soviet help was essential were either necessary or beneficial is another question. In the Leninist economic development framework within which the Bulgarian leadership inevitably operated, massive help was necessary and the Soviet Union was the obvious supplier. Bulgarian loyalty, therefore, may have originated in weakness and evolved into habit. But it reaped its rewards. And as the importance of Bulgaria to the Soviet Union grew beyond anything that could originally have been contemplated, the Bulgarian leaders probably increasingly saw their link with Moscow as a relationship in which both had something to offer and from which both could show a profit.

## THE CHINESE CONNECTION

Loyalty notwithstanding, however, the Bulgarian relationship has not been entirely problem-free for the Soviets. It took about 20 years for the Bulgarian party to shake off the "left-sectarianism" that had characterized it during its infancy, when it was illegal. This was evident during the second half of the 1950s in Bulgaria's obvious fascination with some of China's experimental "shortcuts" to Communism. During this period, Bulgaria had its own "great leap forward," which, like its Chinese exemplar, ended in disaster. Bulgaria also showed considerable sympathy with the notion of communes, certainly with

the trend toward "gigantism" in Chinese agriculture. The extent of Bulgarian sympathy for China is impossible to estimate, but it seems to have centered on Chervenkov in the late 1950s, when he was--at least in rank--an ordinary Central Committee member.<sup>7</sup> His followers were jocularly dubbed "the Chinese." Some of this pro-Chinese sentiment was probably a legacy of Stalinism, which in repudiating Khrushchev (whom many older East European Communists must still have held in contempt) seemed to have found safekeeping in China. The same could be said for the Bulgarian party's tradition of "internationalism." This tradition had generally meant loyalty to Moscow, but the Moscow of Khrushchev presented a confusing or repellent picture to many "internationalists." The notion of Mao's Peking was at once more familiar and more attractive.

Anti-Yugoslav nationalism also played its part. Yugoslav "revisionism" stood at the other end of the spectrum from "Maoism." Khrushchev seemed considerably closer to "revisionism" than to "Maoism," and despite rebuffs and even near-disasters (in 1956), he seemed determined to court Tito. Moreover, Tito's Yugoslavia held Bulgaria's claimed birthright, Macedonia. Thus, nationalism and ideology became inextricably intertwined for many Bulgarian Communists, as they did for the Hoxha regime in Albania, with Yugoslavia the nexus for both. Many of the Bulgarian Communists might have wished to follow the Hoxha regime into the arms of China, but all except the most romantic and/or obtuse must have realized that Bulgaria's geopolitical location made this impossible. Nevertheless, they were obstinate in their conservatism. When Khrushchev attempted his second big reconciliation with Tito after the 22nd CPSU Congress in 1961, he had to visit Bulgaria within a year to bolster Zhivkov in his efforts to make the Bulgarian Communist party comply.<sup>8</sup> And as late as 1965, according to Zhivkov's own testimony, some of the April military conspirators were imbued with "confused" Chinese sympathies.

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<sup>7</sup> See Brown, *Bulgaria Under Communist Rule*, pp. 116-119.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 126-129.

## THE LYUDMILA PHENOMENON

A second problem for Moscow--less serious, but still exasperating, particularly in view of its source--was presented by Zhivkov's own daughter, Lyudmila. The personality and attributes of this remarkable woman are well known<sup>9</sup> and will not be elaborated here, since only her cultural nationalism is relevant to this discussion. But, thanks to the unstinting support of her doting father, under whose wing she became Minister of Culture and later a Politburo member, she gratified that nationalism to the full. Indeed, had it not been for her untimely death in 1981, she could eventually have been anointed as her father's successor.

Lyudmila's basic aim was to revive Bulgarians' pride in their own history and cultural achievements. This she did--with large financial resources that were placed at her disposal--in archaeology, restoration of monuments and art treasures, well-staged exhibitions, and a body of literature. She was also a patron of modern art and literature, and, though by no means without personal prejudice, she presided over a more relaxed and constructive cultural scene.

Two things reportedly annoyed the Russians about Lyudmila's activities. First, stressing the Bulgarian cultural contributions, she inevitably--and apparently unhesitatingly--pointed up the primacy of her own country *vis-a-vis* Russian civilization in several fields where Moscow had always claimed pride of place. Second, she appeared to emphasize the specific link of Bulgarian culture with Russia less than the Bulgarian link with Europe as a whole.<sup>10</sup> Partly educated at Oxford University, she visited the West more often than she visited the Soviet Union, and she sponsored some highly successful Bulgarian exhibitions in Western Europe and the United States. These took place during a period of East-West detente, when many Bulgarians, in different fields, were making their acquaintance with the West and were impressed with what they saw. There

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<sup>9</sup> The best biographical sketch of Zhivkova is by Yordan Kerov, "Lyudmila Zhivkova--Fragments of a Portrait," RAD Background Report/253, *Radio Free Europe Research*, October 27, 1980.

<sup>10</sup> There is no direct confirmation, but this was the view of informed Bulgarians.

can be little doubt that Lyudmila caused the Soviets some anxiety, but there is also little doubt that she had the continuing support of her father. Her sudden death from a brain hemorrhage in July 1981 inevitably roused suspicions of foul play, but those suspicions seem to have been groundless. Moscow must have been relieved, although the Soviets can hardly have been pleased by the great outpouring of sympathy at Lyudmila's funeral, which was unquestionably a partly nationalist demonstration.

## **SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ISSUES**

Bulgaria's fascination with Maoism and Zhivkov's fatherly support for his wayward daughter were minor irritations for Moscow, compared with the sustained disobedience of Romania, the periodic upheavals in Poland, the broad menace of the Prague Spring, and the near-disaster of Hungary in 1956, not to mention the defections of Yugoslavia and Albania. Bulgaria has generally deserved its reputation as the most pliant of satellites, posing only tolerable difficulties at home and abroad and, in the main, presenting a showpiece of "real existing socialism."

### **The Lack of Social Dissent**

There have been few recorded instances of societal dissent in Bulgaria since the early 1950s, except for some sporadic and poorly reported acts of dissidence in the 1970s. In 1984 and 1985, several incidents of bombing, arson, and sabotage were recorded. Although they have never been explained, it was speculated that some of the incidents were acts of defiance by members of the Turkish minority in the face of the regime's brutal assimilation policy. This sounds quite plausible; however, a note of caution is necessary on the subject of societal dissent. There are no Western press correspondents stationed in Sofia, nor are there even any local stringers for Western news agencies. The number of Bulgarians traveling to the West is limited, and visitors are carefully selected. Western visitors are well shepherded, so only an incident of major proportions would be reported in the West--at least in time for it to be topical. Western exposure is often the factor that not only records public dissent, it also stimulates and broadens it. Thus, one of the major prerequisites for dissent to originate, grow, and flourish has been absent in Bulgaria.

## Economic Progress

Of developments in Bulgaria, the one that has captured most of the world's attention was the country's economic progress and experimentation through the early 1980s. After attaining full power in the late 1940s, the Bulgarian Communists embarked on a classic Communist industrialization drive, largely at the expense of agriculture, which was totally collectivized by the end of the 1950s. Swift progress--some of it albeit more statistical than actual--followed. After Albania, Bulgaria had been the least industrially developed country in Europe, but in the 1950s and 1960s, the annual percentage increases of Bulgarian industrial output were usually in double figures. In the early 1970s, they dropped to 7 or 8 percent, but in the downturn of the late 1970s and early 1980s, they were still higher than those in other East European states.<sup>11</sup> As might be expected, agriculture fared less well. Official Bulgarian statistics indicate a 5 percent yearly average decline in agriculture (net material production) between 1976 and 1980 and, following increases in 1981 and 1982, another downturn in 1983.<sup>12</sup> But even in agriculture, Bulgaria has fared reasonably well relative to the other East European countries, despite huge agro-industrial transformations of the Bulgarian countryside. Certainly Bulgaria has remained more prosperous than either Romania or Albania.

Bulgaria's economic progress is symbolized by its status in the framework of Comecon specialization as one of the main producers of forklifts and various electronic and electrical products. Bulgaria may

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<sup>11</sup> For data issued by the Wiener Institut fuer internationale Wirtschaftsvergleiche on the performance of all the European Comecon states, see *Neue Zuercher Zeitung*, April 5-6, 1985; Marvin Jackson, "Recent Economic Performance and Policy in Bulgaria," in Joint Economic Committee, Congress of the United States, *East European Economies: Slow Growth in the 1980s*, Vol. 3, Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1986. According to Jackson, Bulgarian official data show a 6.1 percent average annual increase in net material production between 1976 and 1980 and a corresponding average increase of 4.65 percent in 1981-1982. Western calculations of GNP growth show a 0.9 percent average increase for 1976-1980, and a 2.9 percent increase for 1981-1982.

<sup>12</sup> Jackson, "Recent Economic Performance and Policy in Bulgaria," p. 29.

still be famous for attar of roses and fine tobacco, but these exotic products represent a link with the past, not the present and the future. By 1983, agricultural exports accounted for only one-quarter of Bulgaria's total exports.<sup>13</sup>

In recent years, Bulgaria has succeeded in reducing its net hard-currency debt. This debt stood at \$4 billion in 1979--one of the highest per capita levels in Eastern Europe. By the beginning of 1985, it was down to \$1.4 billion. This noteworthy feat was made possible mainly by a hard-currency trade surplus of nearly \$600 million in both 1981 and 1982 and \$460 million in 1983.<sup>14</sup> Most of that surplus resulted from reexports of Soviet oil (which accounted for about two-thirds of Bulgaria's exports to OECD countries).

The economic reforms (or reorganizations) with which the Bulgarian regime has experimented have been remarkable in their number, scope, and variety. Following the "Chinese-type" experiments with which the regime flirted in the late 1950s, a period of reform discussion and reform proposals was initiated by Professor Liberman's "go-ahead" signal from Moscow in 1962. Suggestions for a system very similar to the Yugoslav self-management system were made by leading personalities, and after a series of interesting experiments, an official program for reform, similar to the initial reforms proposed by Ota Sik in Czechoslovakia, was presented to the public in 1964.<sup>15</sup> By the Yugoslav and Polish standards of the 1950s, the Hungarian and Czechoslovak standards of the late 1960s, and even the Chinese standards of the 1980s, the Bulgarian reforms looked timid indeed. But providing, as they did, for a measure of managerial decentralization, the abolition of some price controls, and some deference to the market mechanism, they represented a considerable breakthrough at the time. The reform, however, was never implemented. Not only did it meet all-too-familiar resistance from the entrenched political and economic apparatchiki, it was also affected by the fall of Khrushchev and the quick petering out of the Soviet reform

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<sup>13</sup> See *Financial Times*, Survey, September 7, 1984.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Brown, *Bulgaria Under Communist Rule*, pp. 160-172.

proposals of 1965, which were essentially Khrushchevian in spirit. The Czechoslovak Spring followed, but one month *before* its termination by Soviet-led troops (including a flown-in contingent of obliging Bulgarians) in August 1968, the cautious Zhivkov also terminated his own exercise in economic reform.

After August 1968, the very term "reform" acquired a pejorative political association and was no longer used in orthodox bloc terminology. "Reorganization" or "new mechanism" became the fashionable euphemisms. Again, the Zhivkov regime was well to the fore, coming closer than any other European Comecon country at the time to putting classic Bolshevik notions such as agro-industrial complexes into practice. The aim of these new creations was the "organic unity" of all production derived from or associated with agriculture, through a vertical organizational structure. The first step toward the new complexes was taken--probably unintentionally--with the large-scale merger of collective farms at the end of the 1950s. This necessitated a massive reorganization of administrative districts, local government, and party administration in the 1970s.<sup>16</sup> Cynics have argued that the whole operation was simply a case of "*plus ça change*," but the smoothness of the transition was more likely the result of careful preparation, organization, and implementation. The simultaneous introduction of bonus and incentive schemes, mainly in agriculture but also in parts of industry, was probably even more important. These Bulgarian experiments were watched approvingly in the Soviet Union, and similar reorganizations began to be introduced in the Moldavian republic in the second half of the 1970s.

The agro-industrial complexes (AICs)--like their more industrially oriented (though less numerous) counterparts, the industrial-agrarian complexes (IACs)--were essentially reorganizations well suited to a command-type economy. But by the end of the 1970s, the Bulgarian regime evidently saw that some qualitative change in the command structure of the economy was necessary if the country's performance was to be maintained in a period of serious economic difficulty. The Bulgarians

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<sup>16</sup> See R. N., "Bulgaria's Agro-Industrial Complexes After Seven Years," *Radio Free Europe Research*, February 14, 1977.



were guided in reaching their decision by Moscow, which showed a more tolerant (if still unenthusiastic) attitude toward economic reform after 1978.

It was in this period that what has become known as the Bulgarian New Economic Mechanism (NEM) began to be implemented. The NEM was introduced in two stages: first in agriculture in the late 1970s, and then in industry after 1982.<sup>17</sup> Attracting considerable attention in both the West and the East, it is still in the implementation phase, with new experimental facets being tried piecemeal. There is disagreement over the impact of the reorganization and over how reformist it really is--specifically, over whether the similarities with the Hungarian New Economic Mechanism go beyond the name.<sup>18</sup> Not surprisingly, the Hungarians were anxious to see similarities, largely because the emergence of a Bulgarian NEM makes their own reform less conspicuous. But few outside observers would see much similarity between the two reforms. Though the Hungarian reform contains administrative restraints and safeguards, keeping control and ensuring reversibility if necessary, it allows for a degree of managerial and market *spontaneity* that is quite absent from the Bulgarian reform. Nevertheless, the Bulgarian reform does contain elements of decentralization, scope for profit, and free pricing that make it more relaxed than, for example, the East German system. One sharp break with Bulgarian Communist tradition is the encouragement now being given to small enterprises. The "big is beautiful" philosophy is apparently no longer sacrosanct in Bulgarian economic thinking.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See premier Grisha Filipov's January 1982 statement on the reform to the council of ministers in *Rabotnichesko Delo*, January 15, 1982.

<sup>18</sup> For two well-informed--but skeptical--analyses, see Harry Schleicher, "Von Reform zu reden waere Uebertreibung," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, September 28, 1984; and R. St., "Bulgariens Vortasten zu neuen Wirtschaftsmechanismen," *Neue Zuercher Zeitung*, June 3/4, 1984.

<sup>19</sup> See "Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises," Bulgarian Situation Report, *Radio Free Europe Research*, January 16, 1985; also, "Small Is Beautiful," *The Economist*, November 4-11, 1983.

## The Economic Downturn

A Western student of Communist regimes visited Bulgaria in 1982 and again in the autumn of 1985. He found a dramatic difference in the general economic conditions of the country, the availability of consumer goods, and the popular mood. In 1982, Bulgaria appeared to be on the crest of a wave of economic success. The reform had been comprehensively introduced into an economy that still seemed buoyant; the public generally seemed not only satisfied, but expectant of further progress; there was at least partial relaxation of cultural restrictions. But by the end of 1985, all this appeared to have changed. Bulgaria was suffering a severe economic downturn, with agriculture and the energy supply the main victims. The mood of optimism and expectancy had been replaced by anger and frustration. The regime's cultural policy had become more restrictive. Social stability could no longer be taken for granted. It appeared that the regime's self-confidence, which had been growing throughout the 1970s, had been severely shaken.

Several factors probably caused this transformation. The most important was economic deterioration. This became obvious early in 1985, when Bulgaria was hit by one of the most severe winters on record. This was then followed by a very dry summer. The serious energy shortage that ensued affected not only industry but also households, where the electric power was sometimes cut several times a day for periods of weeks. Street lighting was also affected, and many towns were pitched into almost total darkness night after night, as they were in neighboring Romania. In 1985, Bulgarian agriculture had its worst year in many decades. Planning chief Ivan Iliev, speaking to the Bulgarian parliament at the end of the year, estimated a 9 percent drop in total agricultural output compared with 1984. He also said that grain production was only half what "it might have been expected to be in normal conditions." Iliev explained these failures by describing 1985 as having had "no equal this century" in terms of unfavorable climatic conditions.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Rabotnichesko Delo*, December 13, 1985.

Bulgarian spokesmen probably exaggerate, but there is no doubt that the steepness of the decline was primarily attributable to the abnormal weather. Agriculture certainly suffered from the drought, as did the hydroelectric power network, which was dependent on dams whose water supply had dried up. Much more serious were the inroads made by the weather into the supply of coal, which provides nearly 66 percent of Bulgaria's energy needs. (Water supplies only 7.5 percent; nuclear energy supplies over 26 percent.) Coal mining was severely affected by freezing conditions, and coal supplies from the Soviet Union were disrupted because the Sea of Azov froze over.

But while the weather made a credible scapegoat, was it the only explanation? Even if it were, the fact that the economy and its infrastructure were caught so unawares hardly speaks well for the regime's ability to anticipate and organize. If the Bulgarian economy recovers quickly from the climatic shock and progress is resumed, say, in 1987, it will be fairly clear that the weather was indeed mainly to blame. If the economy does not recover, deeper reasons must be sought. Certainly Bulgarian officials, including Zhivkov himself, have often complained about the twin evils of low productivity and poor quality. In typical Bulgarian fashion, comprehensive campaigns, backed by massive propaganda, have been conducted against these evils. More pragmatically, the 1982 economic reform was at least partly designed to overcome them.

The problems of low productivity and poor quality need solutions, but they are at least known and admitted. Another problem now seems to be looming which could have profound consequences for both the political and the economic situation: The new Gorbachev leadership appears to be taking a less favorable attitude toward Bulgaria. By about the middle of 1985, the Soviets had begun to reduce their oil deliveries to Bulgaria. This could have serious repercussions, since the Bulgarians have depended heavily on reexports of oil to hard-currency areas to reduce their own hard-currency debt and to divert food from exports to the home markets. A full reappraisal will now have to be made. The Soviets have also complained about the quality of imports from Bulgaria, and in the summer of 1985 there were obviously serious difficulties in

concluding new agreements between the two countries on economic cooperation for the 1985-1990 five-year planning period. Since nearly 60 percent of Bulgaria's total foreign trade is with the Soviet Union, the difficulties Moscow is now creating could lead to a serious economic crisis. The Bulgarians, for their part, seem to be unprepared for this new situation. They may, of course, respond to it by introducing further reforms to make the economy more efficient. Or they may do just the opposite, nervously pulling back to the old orthodox centralism, as they did in 1968. If the situation deteriorates seriously, however, Gorbachev could soften his approach and restore at least some of the privileges Bulgaria formerly enjoyed. Whatever happens, if the new Soviet line continues and hardens, a new and more difficult phase for the Bulgarian economy will have begun.

#### BULGARIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

Bulgarian foreign policy has been dominated by the Soviet Union, perhaps more so than the foreign policies of the other East European states. Nevertheless, there are aspects of Bulgarian foreign policy which, while operating within a Soviet-set framework, contain elements of distinguishable Bulgarian national interest.

It has often been argued--not without some validity--that the level of Bulgarian polemics and aggressiveness on the Macedonian issue was a weather vane for Soviet-Yugoslav relations: When these relations were bad, Sofia was unleashed; when they were better, Sofia was restrained. But increasingly over the last 15 years, the Macedonian issue has reassumed a significance and momentum of its own in Bulgaria. This has occurred in the context of a strenuous campaign to rekindle patriotism and combat "national nihilism" and more recently has been pegged to anniversaries of national fulfillment, such as the celebration in 1981 marking the 1300th anniversary of the creation of the first Bulgarian kingdom, or of national frustration, such as the centennial of the Treaty of San Stefano in 1978.<sup>21</sup> The anniversaries celebrated in 1985, especially the centennial of the Bulgarians' victory over Serbia, also

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<sup>21</sup> For an excellent review of this proliferation of anniversaries, see "The 1,100th Anniversary of St. Methodius' Death," Bulgarian Situation Report, *Radio Free Europe Research*, March 28, 1985.

obviously evoked a considerable public response. As a result, the Bulgarian leadership has seemed less willing to act as a pawn in Soviet relations with Yugoslavia, preferring to conduct a policy of its own. Soviet and Bulgarian policies toward Yugoslavia could therefore come to cross-purposes, making it more difficult for Moscow to use Sofia for its own ends.

The Bulgarians have generally been Moscow's main agent in the Balkans, at least since the late 1950s, when Romania began to go its own way. Bulgaria has relayed, ostensibly under its own auspices, obvious Soviet initiatives for disarmament and, in the early 1980s, for a regional nuclear-free zone. It has also, at Moscow's bidding, resisted suggestions for multilateral cooperation among the Balkan states (including, of course, Greece and Turkey) at anything higher than a purely technical level.<sup>22</sup> And yet Bulgaria's Balkan policy has not been without suggestions of a distinctive self-interest. The periodic flurries of Balkan diplomatic activity in which Bulgaria has been prominently engaged have attracted considerable attention and have brought Sofia a certain prominence. The great improvement in relations with Greece has certainly been to Bulgaria's advantage, as was the improvement in relations with Ankara until the disruption caused by Bulgaria's persecution of its large Turkish minority in 1984. Finally, the restraints imposed by Moscow have occasionally seemed to be against Sofia's real inclinations, for example, the Soviet stand against multilateral cooperation in the Balkans.<sup>23</sup>

Bulgaria has been both responsive to and aware of the benefits to be derived from improved relations with the West, particularly the industrialized West European states. Generally, Sofia has followed Moscow's lead, but at times Bulgaria has shown a readiness for expanded relations which have not accorded with a particular Soviet strategy. In

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<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Viktor Meier, "Auch Sofia fuer Balkan-Zusammenarbeit," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, December 23, 1983.

<sup>23</sup> For an excellent analysis of Bulgaria's inclinations toward more assertiveness, see Christian Schmidt-Hauer, "Bulgarien, dass sich im Sozialismus geschickt eingerichtet hat, sucht groessere Eigenstaendigkeit," *Die Zeit*, May 19, 1984.

1966, for example, the Soviet government brusquely rejected West German Chancellor Ludwig Erhard's "peace note"--one of the first milestones of Bonn's *Ostpolitik*--and was immediately supported by rejections from the GDR, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. Bulgaria, along with Romania, did not publicly respond to the note--a telling, but diplomatic means of not disobeying Moscow while at the same time not rejecting Bonn.<sup>24</sup> Some 18 years later, in 1984, Bulgaria adopted roughly the same tactic during a remarkable demonstration of Eastern bloc diplomatic disunity centered on East Germany's obvious wish to maintain good relations with Bonn at a time when the Soviet Union was ostracizing both the West Germans and the Americans. East Germany was openly supported by Hungary and Romania, and Bulgaria refused to join the Soviet, Czechoslovak, and Polish campaign against Bonn. Bulgaria even dropped hints of support for the East German position and generally demonstrated a strong inclination to keep detente alive with Western Europe, and West Germany in particular.<sup>25</sup>

Another even more profoundly beneficial effect of detente in Bulgaria was the extent to which it helped the Bulgarians to feel more European than they ever had. Even though travel to the West remained strictly limited, the greatly increased exposure of Bulgarians to things Western broadened the horizons of many, especially the younger generation.

Bulgaria has been understandably reluctant to see the advantages of the detente of the 1970s discontinued. In particular, detente had enabled an expanding class of Bulgarian economic and technical specialists to see and sample the West for the first time. This experience made them determined to try to preserve the relations that had been so beneficial to Bulgarian economic development. These specialists had prepared and were implementing Bulgaria's economic reform and they seemed to have won the approval or acquiescence of the top political leadership. It was hardly surprising, then, especially in

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<sup>24</sup> Brown, *Bulgaria Under Communist Rule*, p. 285.

<sup>25</sup> For an analysis of this diplomatic "disorder" in Eastern Europe in the summer of 1984, including Bulgaria's role, see Johann Georg Reissmueller, "Unruhe im Vorhof," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, September 18, 1984.

view of the manifest uncertainty in the Kremlin, that the Bulgarian regime would seek to preserve what it could--even if this meant falling short of the prompt and total obedience to Moscow for which it had become notorious.

Notorious is, indeed, a word we use advisedly. The Bulgarian regime's subservience to the Kremlin, in both word and deed, has generally been seen as one of the realities of East European life. Just how Bulgarians view it is difficult to tell. While the depth of Bulgarian affection for, and gratitude to, the Russians is often exaggerated, the fact remains that of the countries that have been historically active in the Balkans, Russia has done Bulgaria the least direct harm--and in the liberation of 1878, it certainly did Bulgaria obvious and lasting good. The real enemies of the Bulgarians have been the Turks, Greeks, and Serbs. Many Bulgarians judge the regime in Sofia by its relations with these nations. And here, Zhivkov passes the test reasonably well. With the Serbs, Sofia's refusal to recognize Macedonia as a nation and its insistence on including Macedonia as part of Bulgarian history, although there is ostensibly no Bulgarian territorial claim on Macedonia, are enough to keep the issue open--with the added bonus of causing a fury in Belgrade. And Bulgaria's relations with Greece and Turkey have generally been conducted in a manner designed to bolster Bulgaria's international image.

### **International Opprobrium**

Bulgarian relations with Ankara were disrupted in late 1984 by the persecution of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria, which involved forcible "Bulgarization." It may have struck some resonance among Bulgarians who saw it as the removal of the last traces of the "Turkish yoke," but it aroused considerable indignation abroad. Shortly after World War II, the Bulgarian regime seemed bent on expelling all Turks from Bulgaria, but the expulsions were ended in the early 1950s after about a quarter of a million Turks had left. The emphasis then began to be placed mainly on peaceful integration or voluntary repatriation, with the agreement of the Turkish government. Early in the 1980s, however, decisions appeared to have been taken to step up the integration process, using force if necessary. This led to violent incidents in

several parts of the country which went largely unnoticed abroad. By the end of 1984, however, probably because a national census was to be taken at the end of the following year, the Turkish minority, which numbered at least 800,000--over 10 percent of the population and growing fast--began to be forced to change their Turkish names to Bulgarian names and to declare themselves as ethnically Bulgarian. The Turkish minority, like the Macedonian minority earlier, was now officially said never to have existed. Those who thought of themselves as Turks, the Bulgarian regime now claimed, were actually the descendants of Bulgarians who had been Turkicized during the 500 years of the Ottoman yoke! The campaign of forced name-changing met with strong resistance, resulting in the reported deaths and injuries of several hundred people. Obviously the measures taken against this very large minority were meant to be the final stage in a process of "national integration" that had already accounted for Macedonians, Pomaks (Bulgarian ethnic converts to Islam during the time of the Ottoman Empire), and Gypsies.<sup>26</sup> But the measures were ill-considered, cynical, and brutal, and they did considerable harm to Bulgaria. They may have been a cause of the outbreak of terrorist actions in 1985 referred to earlier.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the Turks, the vast majority of whom are peasants, might have already responded to this persecution by withholding or destroying their agricultural produce. Finally, there is the harm these actions have done to the Bulgarian image abroad.

Even more serious to Bulgaria's international reputation--because of the publicity it received--was Bulgaria's alleged complicity in the assassination attempt against the Pope in 1981. Even though the charged Bulgarian, Antonov, was eventually not convicted by the Rome court, many throughout the world continue to presume his guilt, especially given the well-documented evidence about Bulgarian complicity in aiding Western terrorism, drug-smuggling, and gun-running.

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<sup>26</sup> Western press coverage of this episode has been extensive. Especially recommended are Viktor Meier, "Sofia gefaehrdet seine Beziehungen zu Ankara," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, February 14, 1985; and "Officials Say There are No Turks in Bulgaria," Bulgarian Situation Report, *Radio Free Europe Research*, March 28, 1985.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, *Agence France Presse*, September 19, 1984.



### A Change of Soviet Attitude?

Of more direct concern to the Bulgarian leadership, however, were the unmistakable signals of Gorbachev's new, colder attitude toward Sofia. These signals certainly threatened the intimacy of relations that had been so beneficial to the Zhivkov leadership.

This intimacy, however, did perhaps lead to an oversimplified picture. As already mentioned, Khrushchev had difficulties with the Bulgarians over China and over relations with Yugoslavia, and there was the embarrassment of the attempted military coup in April 1965. But generally, the picture was an accurate one--at least up to about 1975, when the Soviets began to object to some aspects of Lyudmila Zhivkov's cultural nationalism and her encouragement of cultural contacts with the West. But after Lyudmila's death, the intimacy of relations appears to have been restored. Brezhnev's death and his replacement by Andropov then caused uncertainty once again. Zhivkov had seemed to be very close to Chernenko and to have banked on his succeeding Andropov. Chernenko did replace Andropov, presumably to the relief of the Zhivkov regime; but that relief was to be short-lived.

Chernenko's successor, Gorbachev, a protege of Andropov, soon made it clear that Bulgaria could no longer count on the special Soviet treatment it had been receiving. The first obvious sign of this was a rambling, patronizing interview given by the Soviet ambassador, Grekov, to a Bulgarian journal in July 1985, complaining about the quality of Bulgarian exports to the Soviet Union as well as Bulgarian productivity and work habits. Other remarks in the interview suggested that, in general, all was not as rosy as it had once been between the two countries.<sup>28</sup>

It was soon evident that, erratic though some of these remarks were, they did reflect a tougher Soviet attitude. The economic aspects and dangers of the situation have been discussed earlier. But the political aspects could be just as serious. It was rumored in early 1986 that Gorbachev might wish to put Zhivkov out to (ceremonial) pasture. Zhivkov, who is now 75, would remain head of state, at least

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<sup>28</sup> *Pogled*, July 1, 1985.

temporarily, but would be shorn of most of his power, which would then go to a younger man, perhaps Ognyan Doynov or Chudomir Alexandrov, both of whom received promotions at the beginning of 1986. Zhivkov, in fact, retained all his positions at the Bulgarian Party Congress in April 1986, but a number of other personnel changes were made, raising the prospect of leadership turmoil in the Zhivkov succession.

### UNCERTAINTY AHEAD

By the end of 1985, a remarkable transformation had occurred in Bulgaria's situation, compared with the situation only five years before. In 1980, the regime was acquiring a degree of legitimacy from a population more prosperous than ever and expecting the progress to be consolidated and continued. Five years later, much had changed: Lyudmila Zhivkov was dead; cultural freedoms were once again restricted; terrorist acts had occurred and new antiterrorist measures had been introduced;<sup>29</sup> the youth were restless and alienated; economic progress had been halted and in many cases reversed; streets were being plunged into darkness because of energy shortages; Bulgaria's international reputation was severely damaged; Zhivkov was five years older; and Bulgaria was losing its most-favored-nation status with Moscow, a loss which could have the most profound economic and political consequences.

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<sup>29</sup> See "Tightening of Antiterror Legislation," Bulgarian Situation Report, *Radio Free Europe Research*, May 24, 1985.

## II. CZECHOSLOVAKIA

August 1968 saw perhaps the most important watershed to date in East European Communist history: By invading Czechoslovakia with the help of all its allies except Romania, the Soviet Union served notice of its refusal to allow a dependent Communist regime to regenerate itself in terms of its own history and ideals.<sup>1</sup>

It is useless to speculate now on how far the regeneration begun by the Prague Spring would have gone or what the "knock-on" effect on other Communist states might have been. What is worth recording is that today, 18 years later, some of the political ideals the Czechoslovak reformers were espousing (and these were the essence of the Prague Spring), including the articulation of group interests, social and political pluralism, and diminution or diversification of the party's monopoly of power, are now being gingerly suggested in Hungary and openly debated in Yugoslavia.<sup>2</sup> In the current context, these reforms are being presented not so much as desirable, but as unavoidable if the complexities of public life are to be tackled efficiently. In Poland, the birth of Solidarity, though obviously a distinctively Polish phenomenon, was clearly influenced by the events of 1968. Solidarity itself was, after all, an independent vehicle for articulating group interests. But the strongest effect the Czechoslovak events of 1968 had

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<sup>1</sup> The literature on the Prague Spring is extensive, and most of it is of good quality. But Gordon Skilling's monumental work is not likely to be surpassed: H. Gordon Skilling, *The Interrupted Revolution*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1976. The best eyewitness account is that of Zdenek Mlynarz, *Nightfrost in Prague: The End of Human Socialism*, Karz Publishers, New York, 1980.

<sup>2</sup> Discussion is inevitably less open in Hungary than in Yugoslavia. But keen discussion is known to go on behind "closed doors." Also, prominent Hungarians are less reticent in interviews given to the foreign press. See, for example, Andras Hegedus' interview in *Corriere della Sera*, July 26, 1984, and Reszo Nyers' interview in the same newspaper, July 29, 1984. In Yugoslavia, the discussion is open and often hectic. See, for example, Zdenko Antic, "Academics Urge a Change in the System," Situation Report (Yugoslavia), *Radio Free Europe Research*, March 1, 1985.

on Poland was to reinforce the conviction of Polish reformers that operating through the political establishment was pointless. If change was to come, it had to be through an extra-party movement--"society against the state," to put it perhaps too simply.<sup>3</sup>

Of course, not only reformers, but also regimes learned from the Prague Spring. Above all, the dangers of the Czechoslovak reform movement were not lost on the Soviet leadership. For several years after 1968, Brezhnev's policy in Eastern Europe was aimed at preventing similar pluralism and spontaneity from occurring, thereby precluding the necessity for military coercion. A new phase of Soviet decisiveness was ushered in, designed to tighten the alliance by strengthening Moscow's leadership, but at the same time by giving its junior partners a greater sense of participation. Moves to this effect were accompanied by a new ideological campaign stressing orthodox Leninism. Moreover, every East European regime, except possibly the Hungarian, tried to strengthen its defenses against the kind of insidious reformist penetration which was considered to have occurred in Czechoslovakia.

Rather belatedly, therefore, the Prague Spring did have its impact on Eastern Europe. And whatever now happens in Hungary, Yugoslavia, or Poland, those effects will continue, because the Czech movement was both a reflection of societal aspirations and a means of resolving hard practical problems of governance. One of the real tests of Mikhail Gorbachev's imaginativeness and realism will be whether he is prepared to countenance some of the steps the Czechoslovak reformers were urging.

But all this can be of little comfort to most Czechoslovaks. Although their economy is now desperately in need of the kind of reform that was being contemplated 18 years ago, their present leaders dare not countenance it. At the Czechoslovak Party Congress in March 1986, some overdue reform measures were indicated. But for Husak and his coterie, the trauma of 1968 seems to have lost none of its reality. Whereas all the main Soviet actors in the drama of that year are dead, their Czechoslovak counterparts--except President Svoboda and Defense Minister Dzur, who died in early 1985--are still alive and in power. As long as these men remain in power, the *immobilisme* seems likely to persist, in

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<sup>3</sup> This view was strongly held by the KOR intellectuals in Poland.

spite of any fresh winds that might blow from Moscow and the obvious need for change at home.

Considering the enthusiasm generated by the Prague Spring, although the main support came from the Czech Lands, it was surprising how soon the situation in the whole country became normalized after August 1968. The contrast with Poland after December 1981 is striking. Poland was indeed pacified relatively quickly, and Solidarity as an organized movement was broken swiftly and with surprisingly little bloodshed. But even by 1986, the country had not been normalized; passive resistance and defiance still continued. In Czechoslovakia, resistance soon fizzled out, and by 1970 the whole country had become sufficiently normalized for economic activity to begin staging a quite remarkable revival.

#### THE RECOVERY AFTER 1968

The economic recovery in Czechoslovakia was presided over by Gustav Husak, who replaced Alexander Dubcek as party leader in April 1969 and the deceased Ludvik Svoboda as state president in 1975. Vladimir Kusin has attributed the Husak regime's success to what he calls "the 3 Cs": coercion, consumerism and circuses."<sup>4</sup> Coercion was certainly there. Not the vicious persecution of Stalinist times or even the kind following the Hungarian revolution, but coercion in the form of mass purges and dismissals of probably over half a million people, among them many of the most qualified political, professional, and military personnel. This massive coercion was backed and guaranteed by a strong force of civil police and militia, full-time and part-time; by the thoroughly purged Czechoslovak armed forces, which numbered about 200,000; and, of course, by the Soviet occupation force, which numbered between 50,000 and 75,000.

By "circuses," Kusin means the "toleration of a widened range of individual entertainment [which] formed another factor in the depoliticization scheme." The entertainment included pop music (as long

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<sup>4</sup> Vladimir V. Kusin, "Husak's Czechoslovakia and Economic Stagnation," *Problems of Communism*, May-June 1982, especially pp. 25-29. See also Kusin, *From Dubcek to Charter 77*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1978.

as it was tepid enough), Western films and TV movies, detective stories, and a plethora of cookbooks and soap opera TV sagas (some of which were later to win a considerable following--and glean considerable hard currency--in the West). More substantial was the regime's material and moral encouragement of house and apartment building, especially of weekend dwellings in the country. These country retreats increased from 128,000 in 1969 to 160,000 in 1973 to 225,000 in 1981 in the Czech Lands alone.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, there is "consumerism." In the late 1960s and the first half of the 1970s, Czechoslovakia was enjoying an almost unprecedented prosperity. All the countries of the region prospered at that time, some manifestly more than others. There was a global boom. Western Europe, with which economic relations had been expanding considerably, was still enjoying its postwar recovery, accelerated by the establishment of the Common Market. Prosperity, in both the East and the West, was built on oil that was cheap, regardless of its provenance. But in Eastern Europe, there was a political element also.

"Consumerism" was a vital part of the Soviet leadership's post-1968 program for Eastern Europe, the main aim of which, as already mentioned, was to prevent anything like the Prague Spring from happening again and requiring the Soviets to resort to force in their empire.<sup>6</sup> It was hardly coincidental, therefore, that the two East European countries that experienced the greatest increases in real incomes and living standards were Poland, after the riots of 1970 that toppled Gomulka, and Czechoslovakia. And in both cases, the Soviets helped directly with financial aid to maintain living standards in the immediate aftermath of the upheavals, although Czechoslovakia appears to have received substantially less aid than Poland.

The rise in living standards in Czechoslovakia can be demonstrated by a few figures. Between 1971 and 1975, while real wages rose by a relatively modest 5 percent, personal consumption rose by 27 percent.

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<sup>5</sup> Kusin, "Husak's Czechoslovakia and Economic Stagnation," p. 28.

<sup>6</sup> See J. F. Brown, *Relations Between the Soviet Union and Its Eastern European Allies: A Survey*, The RAND Corporation, R-1742-PR, November 1975.

In 1971, one in 17 people had an automobile; in 1975, one in 10; in 1979, one in 8.<sup>7</sup>

The "3 Cs," therefore, provide a convincing explanation for the success of Husak's normalization. But do they go far enough? Perhaps three more reasons could be given. Certainly Husak's leadership cannot be ignored. Moral revulsion at his liquidation of what was left of the reform movement after 1969 should not blind one to his political skills or to his strong resistance to the vengeful cries within the party for a Stalin-type reckoning with the 1968 reformers. What happened was bad enough. Without Husak, it probably would have been much worse. Husak turned out not to be a Kadar, but neither was he a Rakosi.

Second, there was the situation in Slovakia. Some historians--and many more social scientists--treat Czechoslovakia either as if Slovakia did not exist or as if it gave a similar, though less developed, picture of the Czech Lands. Also, many Czech observers who are pillars of liberalism in other respects have difficulties in accepting the distinctiveness of Slovakia and Slovaks. (Here, the English attitude toward the Scots and the Welsh springs readily to mind.) But the distinctiveness of Slovakia has been a fact of Czechoslovak life ever since the foundation of the First Republic; and since 1968 this distinctiveness has been increasingly apparent. What motivated most Slovaks in 1968 was not democracy but nationalism. What they wanted was federal status for Slovakia. This they got in October 1968, and it was the only major reform of the Prague Spring that has survived, despite its subsequent dilutions.<sup>8</sup> Since 1968, many of the burgeoning Slovak political and economic elite have been relatively satisfied. Jobs in the growing Bratislava bureaucracy have been plentiful; Czechs, who once dominated Slovak economic and educational life, have virtually disappeared; there are also now more jobs for Slovaks in the federal bureaucracy in Prague, not a few by virtue of the fact that the Czechoslovak president and party leader was once accused

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<sup>7</sup> Kusin, "Husak's Czechoslovakia and Economic Stagnation," p. 27.

<sup>8</sup> For a survey of Slovakia during and after the Prague Spring, see Eugen Steiner, *The Slovak Dilemma*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1973.

of being a Slovak nationalist.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the post-1968 regime in Slovakia has been moderate compared with that in the Czech Lands. This is both because there was considerably less heresy to stamp out and because the ruling team in Bratislava--especially party leader Lenart, premier Colotka, and culture minister Valek--imposed normalization with a certain restraint and circumspection. It was mainly in its war against the Roman Catholic Church, which had revived strongly in 1968, that the Bratislava regime showed viciousness in deed as well as word. This vicious campaign was waged under the banner of the struggle against "clerical fascism," still an evocative term in Slovakia.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, in analyzing the relative ease of normalization in the Czech Lands, account must be taken of the national psyche or mood. Plumbing the depths of national character is a hazardous business, but, at the risk of considerable oversimplification, it seems evident that many citizens after August 1968 lapsed into the despair that is a familiar feature of the Czech historical landscape. The result was disillusionment, mutual recrimination, a search for scapegoats, rejection of public life and retreat into private life, and as much material (and sometimes immoral) self-aggrandizement as possible. This did not necessarily mean collaboration with the Husak regime; rather, it implied toleration of it and a determination to get as much out of it as possible. In many cases, this aggregation of attitudes led to general self-contempt and cynicism, which are probably the most profound problems of all in the Czech Lands today.

## THE ECONOMIC SLOWDOWN

But the economic success that accompanied and facilitated normalization did not last beyond the first half of the 1970s. There were several reasons for this, some applying to the whole of Eastern Europe, others particular to Czechoslovakia. The first two reasons

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<sup>9</sup> See Viktor Meier, "Die Slowakei ist selbstbewusster," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, December 13, 1984.

<sup>10</sup> It is very difficult to verify reports about the victimization of clergy and the atrocities against them. Many of the reports are carried in the German language Catholic news agencies, KNA and Kathpress. Some are undoubtedly exaggerated, but there is no reason to doubt the basic truth of many of them.



sprang directly or indirectly from radical deteriorations in the energy situation. The OPEC price explosion of the early 1970s ushered in an economic recession in Western Europe and the United States, a recession which the second OPEC price explosion at the end of the decade served to intensify. There was a time lag of about two years before the effects of the Western recession began to affect Eastern Europe. But beginning in 1975, the Soviet Union readjusted its own price gauge for oil and other raw materials upward, obviously in response to the OPEC decisions. Soviet oil prices at that time were still about 30 percent below world prices, but this was small comfort to the East Europeans, who found their Soviet oil bill more than doubled almost overnight and have since seen the gap between world and Soviet oil prices narrow and then virtually disappear. Soviet prices are geared to world prices, so of course they rocketed again with the second OPEC price explosion.<sup>11</sup>

These drastic Soviet price increases hit the two most industrialized East European states, East Germany and Czechoslovakia, hardest. By 1980, Czechoslovakia was paying nearly five times as much for a ton of Soviet oil as it did in 1971 and was having to import almost twice as much. This situation partly caused and fully coincided with a Czechoslovak industrial depression that led to negative industrial growth in 1981 and 1982 and overall negative national income in 1981. The situation recalled that at the beginning of the 1960s.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, in key respects, the situation in the 1980s was worse than that in the 1960s. At the beginning of the 1960s, Czechoslovak industry and important elements of the economic infrastructure were relatively modern, and the price of Soviet raw materials was low and seemed likely to remain so. By 1982, much of Czechoslovak industry and its infrastructure was that much older, and Soviet oil deliveries were that much more expensive--Soviet oil supplies were cut by 10 percent in 1982 anyway.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, though current supplies have been officially

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<sup>11</sup> For an excellent discussion of these developments, see Paul Marer, "Intrabloc Economic Relations and Prospects," in David Holloway and Jane M.O. Sharp (eds.), *The Warsaw Pact: Alliance in Transition*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, N.Y., 1984, pp. 215-238.

<sup>12</sup> Kusin, "Husak's Czechoslovakia and Economic Stagnation," p. 31.

<sup>13</sup> This cut affected other East European countries also; see *Washington Post*, December 11, 1981.

guaranteed through the end of this decade, the prospects for oil supplies after that look bleak. (Gas is likely to be the main Soviet energy export in the 1990s--certainly to Eastern Europe, whose industries will be faced with the not inconsiderable problems of conversion.)<sup>14</sup> Czechoslovak industry, like East European industry generally, had always been grossly spendthrift in its use of oil. But the greatest single problem the economy faced by 1982 was the huge number of unfinished investment projects. At the end of 1981, about 30,000 industrial building sites stood unfinished, tying up capital that represented just over 20 percent of all capital funds in the Czechoslovak economy for that year.<sup>15</sup>

This situation, resulting from a serious overcommitment to investment, represented a major economic disaster for Czechoslovakia. The investment was self-financed and, as it turned out, could not be paid for by industrial output and export. Czechoslovakia refused, or was not allowed, to indulge in a capital investment drive financed by Western credits, as most other East European states had done.<sup>16</sup> In Gierek's Poland, of course, capital investment based on Western credits led to spectacular disaster, and the Czechoslovak leaders are now patting themselves on the back for their wisdom and foresight. But foreign credits wisely used--as Poland's were not--could certainly have avoided the investment impasse in which the economy now finds itself.

Moreover, a combination of wisely used Western credits and a New Economic Mechanism, both of which are included in Hungary's basic economic strategy, might well have secured the Czechoslovak economy by seeing it through its next unavoidable industrial revolution, that of modernization and intensification. It is this daunting task, in industry itself and in its infrastructure, that must now be faced--and it is more urgent for Czechoslovakia than for any other East

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<sup>14</sup> "Neue Strategie Moskaus in der Energiewirtschaft," *Neue Zuercher Zeitung*, December 7, 1984.

<sup>15</sup> See *Pravda* (Bratislava), July 11, 1981, and July 22, 1981.

<sup>16</sup> At the end of 1984, Czechoslovakia's net hard-currency debt was put at \$2.5 billion; Poland's was \$24.0 billion (*Neue Zuercher Zeitung*, March 27, 1985).

European country. But it is unlikely that the task will be undertaken soon enough. For one thing, the Czechoslovak regime, like several others in Eastern Europe, is now cutting down on investment funds in order to keep consumption up, as well as to keep sufficient reserves to expend in the energy sector. But more fundamental is the basic fear of change that characterizes the Husak leadership. In view of their devastating experience in 1968, their craving for the safety of orthodoxy is perhaps understandable. And for several years, as already mentioned, this conservatism seemed to be doing the economy no harm. But the abhorrence of change has become a way of life, or at least of governance. The rut into which the leadership has fallen has become ever deeper and ever more difficult to escape from. Husak rejected Kadarism from the outset (or the Soviets rejected it for him), but now, even if he changed his mind, he would have difficulty embracing the pragmatism, receptiveness, and willingness to take risks that characterize the Budapest leadership. In any event, the deeply entrenched ideologues and apparatchiks of the post-1968 era, for whom Vasil Bilak has been the seldom silent spokesman, would most likely be able to block any move for real change.

#### PARTY DISPUTES AND DIFFICULTIES

Once the ice that binds the Czechoslovak leadership begins to crack--and soon it must, if only because of old age and frail health--pragmatism could begin to make inroads on orthodoxy. A body of opinion appears to be forming at a high level, urging at least some change. What is needed for a breakthrough is the combination of the physical weakening of the old guard in Prague and consistent support from the new guard in Moscow. And unless Gorbachev has flattered to deceive or is thwarted by the Soviet Union's own massive deadweight, it seems that support could come from Moscow relatively soon. Not all the potential reformers in Prague can be identified; there may indeed be more than are suspected. But premier Lubomir Strougal is believed to lead the reformist pack. Before his dismissal in late 1985, former finance minister Leopold Ler was considered the most senior active reform advocate.<sup>17</sup> (Ler was primarily responsible for the so-called "Set of

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<sup>17</sup> Kusin, "Husak's Czechoslovakia and Economic Stagnation," p. 36.

Measures" in 1981--steps in the direction of economic reform, but basically nothing more than tinkering. His dismissal, however, was apparently for personal, not political, reasons.) Rather surprisingly, Politburo member Milos Jakes, long considered a firmly entrenched conservative with strong links to Moscow, appears now to be emerging as a man ready to push reform if (or when) it becomes acceptable. There must be others; and both inside and outside the establishment there is a large pool of economic and technical ability, larger than any in Eastern Europe, except perhaps in East Germany. The most recent Czechoslovak Party Congress (in March 1986) probably gave the reformers some encouragement. It is difficult to say what kind of reform might emerge. Just beyond its borders, Czechoslovakia has two different examples of Communist reform, the East German and the Hungarian--one "conservative," the other "radical." It might be more politically propitious to turn to the former. But even that would be a real improvement over the marasmic condition of today.

Economic reform, of course, may not be the only issue on which a crumbling Czechoslovak leadership might divide. This--or, indeed, any other issue of policy--may simply be the fig leaf covering the real motivations of power which lie behind most leadership struggles. But it is the Czech-Slovak relationship that could become either an explosive or a steadily debilitating factor, unique to Czechoslovakia.

The establishment of the federation in 1968, though not the whole cake some wanted, satisfied the Slovaks, at least temporarily. It did not give anywhere near the same satisfaction to the Czechs. Nor did it settle important problems of the Czech-Slovak relationship: the division of investments between the two republics, for example, or the division of posts at the federal level. Regarding the latter, as long as a Slovak of Husak's stature and ability remains at the top and the memories of 1968 bind the leadership together, there is likely to be little friction, at least in the higher echelons. (Lower down, there is apparently friction enough.) When Husak departs, however, it is very unlikely that the Czechs will tolerate a Slovak as both Czechoslovak president and party leader again. If Husak were simply to give up the

party leadership and remain president (a possibility, considering his failing health), many Czechs would not want another Slovak as party leader--particularly with a Slovak president. Similarly, many Slovaks would not want to see Czechs as both head of the party and head of government. The opportunities for dispute are legion. And there is no one in sight after Husak with the stature to bridge the jealousies. Milos Jakes would appear to be the strongest contender at present to succeed as party leader. But he is Czech. The best solution would probably be a Czech as president and a Czech and Slovak taking the top party and government posts. But there would be disputes over which posts. The point is that as long as there is a strong central government and central party located in Prague, the Czech-Slovak relationship affecting position, patronage, and many other matters will be a problem. And the problem need not just be domestic. It could present Moscow with *divide et impera* opportunities should the need to bring Czechoslovakia to heel ever arise again.

The Czech-Slovak relation is not the only national problem in Czechoslovakia. There is the Slovak-Hungarian problem arising from the presence of a Hungarian minority of some 600,000 in Slovakia. Traditionally, a Slovak nationalist was anti-Hungarian by definition (Gustav Husak was no exception), since Slovakia had been an integral part of Hungary for a thousand years and Slovaks were often subjected to ruthless magyarization. With the establishment of Czechoslovakia, the roles were reversed, and the Hungarians were subjected to intermittent persecution of various kinds. Since federation, which removed any protection Prague may have offered the Hungarians, there is little doubt that Hungarian minority rights have often been violated. This has led to a spirited reaction among many Hungarian Slovaks, popular indignation in Hungary itself, and quiet representations from the Hungarian government.<sup>18</sup> Budapest's anger is not as great in this case as it is in the case of the Hungarians in Transylvania, but it is nevertheless serious, and likely to get more so.

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<sup>18</sup> For a description of the current situation of Hungarians in Czechoslovakia, see Suzanne Satory, *Le Monde*, November 4-5, 1984.

## CURRENTS IN SOCIETY

Husak's methods of ensuring "normalization" in post-invasion Czechoslovakia were discussed earlier. The point was made that those measures had been facilitated by popular disappointment and apathy. It is not surprising, therefore, that societal dissent was generally of the sullen, passive variety, seeking outlets in internalization and material pursuits. This attitude was very striking in the first part of the 1970s and has remained typical to this day. But over the last 10 years, it has not been fully representative of Czechoslovak society as a whole, some of whose best representatives have refused to wallow in a morass of defeat and consumerism. Gordon Skilling has described the various strands of independent activity that have recently criss-crossed the Czech Lands.<sup>19</sup> Charter 77, of course, has tended to dominate this activity and has certainly captured most attention in the West. Beginning in January 1977 with a declaration signed by 241 men and women of assorted political views, its signatory-members had by 1985 grown to about 1200, of whom 200 had emigrated to the West. The Chartists, though few in number and essentially Czech intellectuals (mostly from Prague), have certainly had an influence out of all proportion to their numbers; their "spokesmen"--now rotated annually--have included famous and worthy men like playwright Vaclav Havel, former foreign minister (in 1968) Jiri Hajek, and philosopher Jan Patocka. These were the three original spokesmen; most of those who have followed, though less famous, have also been highly regarded and courageous. From the beginning, the regime regarded the Chartists as its main enemy: some of its members have been imprisoned, and almost all have been hounded or harassed. In 1979, Charter 77 began publishing "position papers," or "situation reports," on a wide variety of public issues, including prison conditions, scientific research, price rises, and school reform.<sup>20</sup> One of its best-known papers covered the disastrous ecological situation in

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<sup>19</sup> H. Gordon Skilling, "Independent Currents in Czechoslovakia," *Problems of Communism*, January-February 1985, pp. 32-49.

<sup>20</sup> For the early years of the Charter, see H. Gordon Skilling, *Charter 77 and Human Rights in Czechoslovakia*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1981. For a list of Charter papers for 1983 alone, see "Charter 77 in 1983: Documents," *Radio Free Europe Research*, January 24, 1984.

the industrial parts of the Czech Lands, about which public unease and even regime concern have been steadily mounting.<sup>21</sup> This paper could indeed become one of the most historic of all Charter 77's publications. The damage being done by industrial pollution, not only to nature, but also to human beings in and near the industrial parts of Bohemia and Moravia, is on a scale that for many makes ecology just as important as politics or the economy.

Clearly connected with Charter 77, though institutionally separate, is VONS (the Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Persecuted), which was founded in 1978. VONS issues regular communiques on cases of persecution of all kinds and, not surprisingly, is even more the object of police attention than Charter 77. Over 450 VONS communiques had been issued by mid-1985.

Preceding both Charter 77 and VONS was the publication of literature under the auspices of several underground (*samizdat*) publishing houses, of which Edice Petlice (Padlock Press) became the best known. Founded by Ludvik Vaculik, one of Czechoslovakia's best writers, a giant of the Prague Spring, and later a signatory of Charter 77, Padlock Press has published over 250 volumes. Nearly all of this underground literature is produced (for legal reasons) on typewriters with as many carbons as the machines will take, and, like its much more widely circulated Polish Solidarity counterpart, it often falls far short of mechanical perfection. The readership of all this underground literature is, of course, very small. But the information that is published reaches the West and is relayed back to Czechoslovakia by Western radios. The same is true for articles in the considerable number of literary and scholarly journals that also appear in *samizdat*. Perhaps the best known of these journals is the literary *Kritický Sborník* (Critical Review), which has appeared four times a year since 1981.<sup>22</sup> These journals are not confined to literature; some are devoted to politics and economics. All this literature is not only proof of the courage of many of the best minds in the Czech Lands, but also a sober reminder of what the *pays legal* is losing by depriving itself of their abilities.

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<sup>21</sup> See Hannes Burger, "Ueberlebenskampf im Erzgebirge," *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, August 27, 1984.

<sup>22</sup> Skilling, *Problems of Communism*, p. 40.

Young people in Czechoslovakia--like young people everywhere--often express their frustrations in music. Rock music is very popular, especially in the Czech Lands, and is supported by distinguished intellectuals within the country, such as Havel, and by Milan Kundera and Josef Skvorecky in exile.<sup>23</sup> Pop music and jazz are also popular, and it seems in the natural order of things that Marta Kubisova, perhaps the leading female pop singer, has been a spokesman for Charter 77.

More and more young people, including some of the rock, pop, and jazz addicts, have also been turning to religion. It would be an exaggeration to speak of a "massive" religious revival, but there is little doubt that the Czechs--a traditionally free-thinking people--are displaying more interest in organized and unorganized religion than they have for many years. "Unorganized" here means private, spontaneous (almost "do-your-own-thing") religious meetings, which are also common in Hungary and for which the support of the official Church is sometimes less than enthusiastic.<sup>24</sup> The organized Roman Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia is in a desperate state, with a serious shortage of parish clergy and only three of the country's 13 dioceses having regular bishops.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, the unrelenting discrimination by the state may well be one reason why the Church enjoys more public sympathy today than it ever did. Unlike the Slovak Church, the Church in the Czech Lands has never enjoyed much popular sympathy, being widely regarded as a branch and expression of Hapsburg rule. In the First Republic, the Catholic Church was definitely out of political and intellectual fashion, and the equivocal attitude of its leadership to the Communist takeover in 1948 did little to enhance its prestige. For many years, this lack of firmness in relation to the authorities seemed personified by Archbishop (later, Cardinal) Frantisek Tomasek of Prague.

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<sup>23</sup> See Skvorecky's witty, bitter article about the persecution of various kinds of popular music in "Hipness at Noon," *The New Republic*, December 17, 1984.

<sup>24</sup> See Bradley Graham, "After Brief Thaw, Czechoslovak Ties to Church Frozen Again," *Washington Post*, March 3, 1985.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.



But more recently, bolstered partly by the election of a vigorous Slavic Pope, Tomasek has toughened his attitude toward the Communist authorities and now, at the age of 85, enjoys more popular respect than ever before. There is also no doubt that he is receiving strong support from the Vatican, particularly in his resistance to the pro-regime Pacem in Terris Catholic organization, which was publicly disowned by the Holy See in 1982. Pacem in Terris probably claims the allegiance of a third of Czechoslovakia's more than 3000 priests, but that proportion, if it was ever in fact that large, has dropped considerably since the Papal disavowal. Cardinal Tomasek estimates it now at about 300.<sup>26</sup> However diminished its following, Pacem in Terris, having the strong material backing of the regime, remains a threat to the integrity and independence of the Church. When Tomasek dies, the organization could mount a strong offensive for a greater role and more authority. The Protestant Churches were thoroughly neutered early in the Communist period and offer little resistance to the regime or promise to the people. In this condition, they join, inter alia, in the regime's periodic massive peace campaigns.

The regime, however, has by no means had a monopoly on peace campaigning. Almost from its inception, Charter 77 was active in worldwide peace movements in the West. These contacts sometimes led to difficulties, because although even some of the unofficial (genuine) Czechoslovak peace activists showed elements of naivete, they were realism itself compared with some of their Western colleagues. They did try to keep the general European peace movement politically neutral by stressing the Soviet responsibility in this regard, by stressing that freedom must accompany peace, as must the observance of human rights, and by rejecting the notion of peace at any price. The principle of peace without appeasement seems to have guided their thought and action.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> See Skilling, *Problems of Communism*, pp. 45-47.

For many Czechoslovaks, as for many East Germans, the peace movement received added impetus and a new urgency with the deployment of new Soviet missiles on East European soil at the end of 1983 in response to NATO's INF deployment. The Czech leadership was aware of the disquiet and, like its counterpart in East Berlin, openly admitted it. At the same time, both regimes were nervous about popular reaction, and in Czechoslovakia leading Chartists were apparently warned against any public expression of opposition. Nevertheless, according to Skilling, "a Charter document turned the tables on the regime by quoting an official declaration to the effect that the stationing of missiles in Western Europe did not promote security."<sup>28</sup> There was, indeed, widespread public misgiving, of which a petition from Brno signed by several thousand people was an outstanding example.<sup>29</sup>

#### AN ALTERNATIVE CULTURE?

What emerges from this sketchy survey of independent currents in the Czech Lands is that few of the Czechs are overtly hostile to the regime as such. Of course, in a system that aspires to be totalitarian, anything that is not supportive can be dubbed hostile, anything that is nonconformist, disruptive. And this would apply particularly to the atmosphere of the Czech Lands since 1968. But even the most cursory comparison of Czech *samizdat* and underground activities with their Polish counterparts discloses the difference. Although for over three years much Polish *samizdat* writing has concentrated on sober analyses of topics of public interest--very like many Charter 77 publications--the bulk of Solidarity or Polish resistance activity is still intentionally hostile and antagonistic toward the Communist leadership.

In Czechoslovakia, the resistance is intentionally, and often provocatively, not hostile. In fact, the Czech independent currents mirror much of the societal activity in Eastern Europe as a whole today, certainly in the GDR and Hungary. This activity is designed not so much as a form of opposition to the prevailing political culture, but as an

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., citing *Infoch* (Informace o Charte 1977), January 1975.

alternative to it. Increasingly, the regime establishment goes one way and large elements of society go another. Official values are considered irrelevant or are simply rejected. (The "alternative way of living" of West European countries presents a tempting, though specious, analogy--specious because its practitioners, rather than rejecting basic Western values, insist that they are returning to them.) There has always, of course, been a distinction, often a contradiction, between state and society in Communist Eastern Europe. It also existed in pre-Communist Eastern Europe, though in a less comprehensive way. The contradiction has on several occasions assumed violent forms that have essentially led nowhere, because the forces of coercion have always been overpoweringly on the other side. Now, especially since the awesome example of the crushing of Solidarity in Poland, overt contradiction may gradually be giving way to the development of an active alternative societal culture that avoids confrontation wherever possible. If this is so, it appears that the development is being led by Czechoslovakia, along with East Germany and Hungary, the three countries with probably the most sophisticated societies in the whole region. It is very much a *faute de mieux* development brought on by the basic hopelessness of the situation.

Just how the regimes will cope with this developing trend is difficult to say. Obviously, for ideologists of Suslovian intensity it is anathema--less acceptable, perhaps even less understandable, than outright opposition. To the paid army of agitprop officials throughout the region, it represents permanent employment in a ritualistic campaign against such "apathy." But for today's pragmatic, opportunistic Communist leaders, for whom ideology is now not so much a cause as a ritual (however necessary), this growth of an alternative rather than an antagonistic, culture may be seen as much needed respite, a welcome standoff in a relationship which for 40 years has had an explosive potential. For the Czechoslovak authorities, in particular, an alternative culture embraced by large sections of the thinking public could be the kind of "defeat" they would find by no means unbearable.

In the meantime, however, the authorities have not been exactly tolerant of some aspects of this alternative culture. The discrimination and chicanery against the Church have been mentioned.

The scale of harassment and persecution against Charter 77 and VONS has varied considerably; prison sentences, house detentions, deprivations of citizenship, and the like have taken place against a background of constant professional victimization. The regime has tried to squeeze propaganda advantage out of the peace movement whenever opportunities have presented themselves, but it has not hesitated, especially since the deployment of new INF and Soviet missiles in late 1983, to use sharp persecution, a probable reflection of its own keen embarrassment. There seems to be little central direction in policy toward the rock and pop manifestations of youth; local authorities are given a good deal of discretion. However, this has led to much inconsistency, with considerable tolerance going side-by-side with hard-headed intolerance. In general, any hint of the political in rock lyrics has been fiercely attacked. In this milieu, the authorities know they are not kicking against public opinion: Popular prejudice is almost as great as their own. The lifestyle, mode of dress, and general appearance of most rock groups, together with an alarming increase in drug addiction in Czechoslovakia,<sup>30</sup> militate strongly against much general sympathy for this expression of youthful independence.

### THE SLOVAK DIMENSION

A separate word must be added at this stage about Slovakia. The Slovaks have by no means been *totally* unaffected by the independent currents flowing through the Czech Lands. On the contrary, the situation in a city like Bratislava, for example, is probably not much different in this regard from that in several Czech cities. The youthful currents, especially, are presumably quite similar. Little is known from reliable sources about the real situation in Slovakia. Relatively few Western observers have been allowed into Czechoslovakia in recent years (though the situation is now improving), and only a handful have gone to Slovakia. But it can be assumed that the currents, though present, are weaker in Slovakia, and that there is some prejudice to be overcome against movements of Czech provenance. For example,

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<sup>30</sup> See "Drogensucht in der Tschechoslowakei," anonymous article originating in Czechoslovakia, in *Neue Zuercher Zeitung*, March 16, 1975.

there was practically no Slovak participation in Charter 77. There was, in fact, a good deal of popular suspicion of it.

The main independent force in Slovakia is unquestionably the Catholic Church. Many Slovaks, including some of the younger generation, believe that the Church is the embodiment of the true and only Slovak national spirit.<sup>31</sup> It is certainly seen by the regime as Communism's greatest enemy, and this explains the persecution of it. But between these two antagonistic forces--Communism and the Church--there appears to be a third force in Slovakia, consisting primarily of people under 40 who have little time for either Communism or the Church. They are prepared to accept the benefits the state offers in jobs, status, welfare, etc., and they take some pride in the Husak hegemony in Prague. Yet they show little gratitude to the system, and they reject the nonmaterial "appeals" of Communism almost totally. Though many are indifferent to religion, they tend to baptize, marry, and bury in the Church; and although they deplore its clerical-fascist tradition, they respect the Church as Slovakia's most powerful national institution. It is the strata that make up this third force, neither pro- nor anti-Czech and certainly without the inferiority complex of their fathers toward the Czechs, that are probably the most susceptible to the societal ideas coming eastward from Prague.

## THE OUTLOOK

To make predictions about Czechoslovakia is a hazardous task. It is not simply that Czechoslovakia comprises two nations and one large minority (the Hungarian); within the two nations, especially the Czech, there are many complexities. Any speculation over the outlook must consider three different but interacting levels: state, state-society relations, and society.

**State.** The key question in regard to the state is its management of the economy, which is in need of radical change and quick sustenance. The short-term outlook is bleak; but if the basic deterioration does not accelerate over the next few years, a better longer-term future is

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<sup>31</sup> Manifestations of this can sometimes be seen in pilgrimages. For a good article on a pilgrimage of 150,000 people to the shrine of Levoca in Slovakia, see *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, July 23, 1984.

possible, because (1) the present leadership is bound to disintegrate through age; (2) their replacements will be less inhibited about economic reforms; and (3) the attitude in Moscow could be more favorable.

Economic developments could affect the whole course of political development. A new leadership team introducing economic changes, though determined at first to resist political change, would be much less affected by the "trauma of 1968" and, as time went on, could usher in a more flexible, moderate rule. Economic needs might also lead to a less truculent attitude toward the West.

The Czech-Slovak relationship at the federal level will always be complicated, causing endless haggles over place and patronage. Federation in a binational state--a unique experiment--may simply turn out to benefit the smaller and weaker component.

**State-Society Relations.** In the Czech Lands, if society moves toward an alternative culture with the grudging tolerance of the state, an uneasy stalemate of calm could persist for a long time. If under a new generation of leaders, however, economic reform is accompanied by political relaxation, then a greater societal commitment could result, or at least a public sense of involvement in matters of state. If the Church holds its ground in Slovakia, and the Czech Church, with Vatican support, continues its revival, some real institutional independence could result.

**Society.** The Slovak nation will certainly survive, and Slovak society appears to be relatively healthy and assertive. The Czech nation gives much less ground for optimism. The alternative culture could become the ultimate in privatization, with rejection of the sense of identity as a nation. That is why the work of movements like Charter 77 is so important. These organizations are engaged in "preparing and recultivating the soil for future political changes." The character of these changes will "in part be determined by the preparatory work in that period ... that appeared to be a vacuum but that in reality was filled with strivings to preserve, regenerate and re-cultivate." It will also be determined by those men and women who "took the path of their civic right and duty, even though to the majority of their contemporaries this seemed merely the dangerous conduct of a handful of

fools."<sup>32</sup> It is easy to dismiss such sentiments as noble but isolated, irrelevant, or even academic, yet Czech history suggests that they must be taken seriously.

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<sup>32</sup> Vilem Precan, "Vyvoj Charty, Zaznam z Konference ve Franken [The Charter's Progress, Record of a Conference in Franken]," *Index*, Cologne, 1981, quoted by Skilling, *Problems of Communism*, p. 49.







